

VZCZCXRO3881  
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV  
DE RUEHUP #0754/01 1340712  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 140712Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1239  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0010

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000754

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO NSC FOR ADAM STERLING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2012  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [HU](#)  
SUBJECT: HUNGARIAN VIEWS ON CUBA TRANSITION

Classified By: P/E COUNSELOR ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) Senior officials across Hungary's political spectrum expressed gratitude for USG engagement and strong support for our efforts to "create space" for a democratic transition in Cuba in meetings with Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry May 6 - 7.

¶2. (C) Throughout his meetings, McCarry emphasized the importance of Cuba's democratic opposition's Unity for Freedom statement as a genuine call for democratic change coming from the island. With GoH contacts, he underscored the importance of preserving common ground between the US and the EU. McCarry also emphasized the importance of the current EU Common Position on Cuba and the need to maintain a clear commitment to a democratic outcome in Cuba. He pointed out that removing the special measures from the EU Common Position would send a terrible signal to Cuba's democratic opposition and a confusing message to others in Cuba.

BIG STEPS FROM "A SMALL COUNTRY"

¶3. (C) MFA State Secretary Laszlo Varkonyi outlined current GoH steps to move forward on what he described as Hungary's "moral duty" to support the transition in Cuba. Although the situation is "unclear and unpredictable," he understands "civil society is moving forward - as it did in Hungary" and believes "the transition is already under way." Varkonyi commented that Hungary's steps to "leave the mainstream" had "raised eyebrows," but emphasized that the GoH is prepared for "an uncomfortable relationship" with the Cuban regime in order to reach out to the Cuban people and "tell our story."

¶4. (C) It is not, however, prepared to "jeopardize our relationship with Spain." At FM Goncz's instruction, he had met privately with Spanish MFA counterparts to discuss Cuba, emphasizing that the GoH is "not fomenting revolution but talking about its own transition." Hungarian initiatives are "neither against Spain nor against the Cuban people." He had opened the door to further cooperation, inviting Spanish representatives to attend the GoH's upcoming conference on Cuba to ensure "a broad front," but had found Madrid strongly disinclined to make the significant changes to the existing EU Common Position Hungary favors. Although he commented with pride that he sees Hungary's "modest efforts" having "a disproportionate effect" on international efforts, Varkonyi concluded that "Madrid will not change its position for us."

PREPARING FOR THE BEST ... AND THE WORST

¶5. (C) MP Matyas Eorsi, Chairman of the Parliament's European Affairs Committee and newly-elected faction leader of the SZDSZ party, saw Sarkozy's election in France as a potential opportunity to enter a more cooperate era in US-EU relations, including on Cuba. He expressed his hope that

modest civil society initiatives will "show the people they are empowered" without threatening the government into further repression. He suggested that the regime may be weaker than it appears, noting that "oppressive regimes sometimes lack even the strength to collapse." He also cautioned that "reformers must be prepared for the worst, including a nationalist backlash and future electoral losses." Eorsi also agreed to accept a Freedom House invitation to visit Cuba in July ... "if they will give me a visa."

¶6. (C) MP Zsolt Nemeth, Chairman of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, expressed broad support for efforts to use Hungary's transition as an example for the Cuban people and specifically endorsed the GoH's steps re the potential resettlement of protected migrants from Guantanamo. He also struck a cautionary note, commenting that efforts should be made to "limit the survival of the nomenklatura" and "limit the influence of the emigre community."

IN PARALLEL IF NOT IN TANDEM

¶7. (C) Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati, Director of the International Center for Democratic Transition (ICDT), sees Hungarian efforts playing an important role within the EU and suggested that the Gyurcsany government could use its political affinity for the Zapateros government to influence Spanish policy. He believes Hungary can effectively advocate "a European policy that is about more than opposing America," setting as the goal an EU approach that would work "in parallel if not in tandem" with the U.S. to achieve our shared objective. Although he believes "everybody knows that the U.S. will be a democratic Cuba's closest ally - literally and figuratively," he believes both EU capitals and Cuban citizens will welcome our message that Cuba's future will be

BUDAPEST 00000754 002 OF 002

decided "on the island and not in Miami."

TWO LITTLE WORDS

¶8. (C) FM Goncz welcomed Mr. McCarry's expression of the USG's appreciation for Hungary's efforts, joking that "thank you" are two words "we never hear in Hungarian." She noted the significance of the Cuban opposition finding common ground, commenting that change must come "from inside" but cautioning that civil society took "years to gain experience" in Hungary and that "political change is always the last sign to appear." She emphasized the value of non-political contacts, citing South Korean commercial inroads into North Korea as an example of creative ways to promote change but concluding that "Hungary moved slowly toward success ... and tempers still flare 17 years later." The FM was also reluctant to take on Madrid, remarking that the Czech position reflected in part that it had "nothing to lose." She questioned whether a new EU declaration on Cuba would be "the best idea" given the potential for conflict within the Union, indicating sympathy for Spain's desire to "maintain contacts" and concluding that "all dialogue is good."

MIAMI II

¶9. (C) All interlocutors looked forward to the upcoming Cuba Conference in Budapest, with State Secretary Varkonyi underscoring that "any and all U.S. assistance will be greatly appreciated." Ambassador Gyarmati admitted that he is "still at variance with the Foreign Minister" over the focus of the conference. He also expressed reservations regarding the June 23 date proposed by Ambassador Simonyi, questioning whether the goal should be "a conference American congressmen will attend and Europeans won't."

¶10. (C) Comment: There is broad political consensus behind Hungarian efforts that are modest but building momentum. With a new Ambassador on the ground and further increases to

their diplomatic staff in Havana under consideration, Cuba is becoming Hungary's largest Latin American post. They clearly appreciated Mr. McCarry's emphasis on our efforts to "get this right," but see themselves as lacking the influence to reverse Spain's position. We will continue our efforts to encourage their coordination with like-minded states, and look forward to working with the Department to make the upcoming conference the next step forward. End Comment.

FOLEY